

~Other Speakers A-F: Discernment Research Articles:

Promise Keepers, a rapidly growing ecumenical men's movement, may be the best tool for those holding the Manifest Sons of God doctrines to market their beliefs to the rest of the American church. These beliefs, which are foundational to the Laughing Phenomenon associated with Rodney Howard-Browne, are now entering mainstream churches of all denominations via Promise Keepers. The Manifest Sons of God believe that Christ cannot incarnate in a divided body; therefore, it's crucial that the Church be united. Another term for this is "Joel's Army". Promise Keepers has been likened to this army. An article in Jewel van der Merwe's Discernment newsletter states:

In a recent interview in response to a question as to whether the Promise Keepers could be fulfilling the prophecy in Joel of raising an army, [Pastor] James Ryle answered, "Yes... 300,000 men have come together so far this year under Promise Keepers... Never in history have 300,000 men come together except to go to war. These men are gathered for war."

According to the O Timothy newsletter, "Promise Keepers is a men's movement started... by members of John Wimber's Vineyard Fellowship." Ryle, who has ministered with John Wimber and Paul Cain, is pastor of the Boulder Valley Vineyard and, in association with Boulder member Bill McCartney, founded Promise Keepers in 1990. Ryle is presently a member of the Board of Directors of Promise Keepers, a 'non-denominational,' parachurch organization [whose stated goal] is to celebrate biblical manhood and motivate men toward Christlike masculinity." Vineyard head John Wimber has given his wholehearted approval to the Laughing Phenomenon.

Ryle isn't the only one to promise endtime warriors. During a Pastors' Meeting at the Airport Vineyard in Toronto, where the Laughing Phenomenon is ongoing, Rev. John Arnott said:

And so now we're starting to see people prophetically acting like lions and oxen and eagles and even warriors...it's a wonderful thing and we've seen it spontaneous... We had all four of those manifestations happening at the same time. So what did the man look like? He looked like a warrior, just yelling Ahhhhh!!!! ...[It] just may be the Holy Spirit putting an empowering, like a warrior, on them.

Promise Keepers has incorporated key doctrines of the Manifest Sons of God into their material. The February 1995 issue of Suitable Helpers, a newsletter for women participating in Promise Keepers expresses that believers can become Christ Incarnate: "Our Lord is calling out a great host of men ready and willing to become 'Christs' in their homes: Promise Keepers. In grand, bold sweeps, God has mustered an army."

Noticing the potential political nature of this men's movement is none other than The New Age Journal, which ran an article favorable to Promise Keepers in its April 1995 edition. Writer Jeff Wagenheim noted the odd combination of New Age men's movement ideology (Robert Bly's pantheism) combined with the political evangelicalism of Pat Robertson:

...despite the group's assertions to the contrary, Promise Keepers is an organization with vast political influence. The fact that hundreds of thousands of men are being actively encouraged to adhere to a highly conservative set of values and to work to instill those values in their communities and nation should not just be a matter of theological interest.

An historical precedent for a military-style political/religious movement such as Promise Keepers can be found in Germany during the 30's. According to author Richard Terrell in his provocative book, Resurrecting the Third Reich (Huntington House, 1994), orthodox Christianity was supplanted by the German Volkish faith:

What was to take possession of the German consciousness was a militant romanticism... According to this way of thinking, the Divine Spirit is manifested in the spirit of a people, in their collective genius and total culture or Volkgeist... Germany developed a kind of communal mysticism which contained its own Teutonic concept of a chosen people, called to redeem civilization from its decadence.

Nazism arrived with the full trappings of a full-blown religion. Nazi rallies were glorious pageants that stirred the emotions, which, according to Schleiermacher, were the very well-springs of spiritual truth. The faith to which Hitler called the German people depended not on any revelation of Scripture, but on pure feeling. The Nazi mixture of flags, rich and heroic music (especially that of the fanatically anti-Semitic genius Richard Wagner), and the message of national destiny had the effect of religious festivals. Even today, still photographs of these

meetings have a powerful and gripping presence, and one can imagine the great impact that such a piece of cinematic propaganda as *Triumph of the Will* must have had through its showings in German theaters (see chapter 5).

Terrell describes the advent of this full-blown religion:

The Volkish concept of the social organism was effectively symbolized in mass meetings that expressed a sense of eternity, awe, and mystery, effects stimulated by a "cathedral of light" nighttime mass meetings in which anti-aircraft lights sent brilliant shafts of illumination into the darkened sky. In his speeches, Hitler would frequently characterize his career in politics as a divine calling led by God and insisted that Nazism was more than just a social movement. It was a total worldview, a spirituality, supported by an energetic use of traditional religious words that had, however, become detached from their orthodox, historic meanings. His references to a "thousand year Reich" carried the ring of the biblical millennium.

Is Promise Keepers creating a new "folk" religion? The large mass rallies, the exaltation of emotion over reason, the lack of doctrinal integrity, the taking of oaths (the 7 promises), the focus on fatherland and fatherhood, and the ecumenical inclusion of aberrant esoteric doctrines bears a disconcerting similarity to an era which gave rise to one of the most dreadful armies in history. The infiltration of Manifest Sons of God doctrines into Promise Keepers (via Vineyard) combined with New Age ideologies (via Robert Bly and Robert Hicks) appears to create a new American folk theology: pantheism, the idolatry of self, the belief in a divine mandate to take the land, the superiority of a group, a divine millennium, and the necessity of group hysteria.

While many in the church are jumping wholeheartedly into the Laughing Phenomenon and Promise Keepers, it behooves the rest of the Church to take a sober, steady look at the historical, theological and philosophical underpinnings of these popular movements of our times.